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ABSTRACT

The current popularity of teacher testing allows for content, criterion, and construct validity to be assessed, as pertaining to achievement levels on basic knowledge examinations. Teacher competency is a complex issue that is inaccurately confused with or identified as measures derived from academic testing. The problems in addressing the validity of teacher competencies are located in the very definitions of validity. Items used for measurement will never represent a fair and universal sample of teaching skills. Many skills found in effective teachers are not measurable. Current data on the use of achievement tests for predictability or assessment of concurrent skills is not favorable. The interpretation of standards to explain or provide direction can never be achieved if the content to be measured is unclear. The public is deceiving itself by believing that current methods of assessing teachers are a measurement of teacher competency. (CB)

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Teacher Competency: A Public Farce!

by

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The term "teacher competency" erroneously is applied to the current wave of national teacher programs. Such tests, however, only measure basic knowledge and nothing more. Even so, basic knowledge tests can be counted as only one aspect of competency measures. Further, the public readily accepts the term "teacher competency" as synonymous with teacher testing. Misuse of labels/names can only lead to public deception. Yet, the demand for more testing increases daily. Why?

Overview

The concept of teacher competency has developed into a response to many social issues. Not only had accountability for student competency* been addressed, but the "Nation at Risk" research revealed the following findings: American students for the first time in competition with foreign students, did not place first or second in nineteen areas, illiteracy affected twenty-three million adults, SAT scores declined between 1963-1980, standard achievement tests were the lowest in 26 years, high school graduates were unprepared for employment, and freshmen entered college with decreased reading and writing skills.

Education reforms echoed throughout the nation, demanding the placement of competent teachers in school systems. The establishment of teacher testing for certification began, led, and dominated the teacher competency movement.

By 1983, Southern states took a lead with teacher competency. 21 States, either through state boards of education and/or state legislation mandated

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*Student competency is a measure of achievement based on standardized tests (e.g., CAT, TABS). The Accountability Movement did not flourish because too many flaws and unmeasurable influences could not place total responsibility for student achievement on teachers.

teacher testing for certification. Seven states use the National Teachers Exam (NTE) while 14 states developed their own exams. Tests are used to measure basic skills (e.g., writing), general subject matter, and/or pedagogical knowledge. Such tests are being employed nationwide at various stages of professional development. Competency may occur in any or all of the following situations: entrance into teacher preparation programs (e.g., PPST in Texas), exit from preparation programs (e.g., NTE in Kentucky), certification/licensure (e.g., State Test in Arkansas), and practitioner exams (e.g., undeveloped state test in Texas).

The issue of tests as a valid measure of teacher competency is a major concern. Can competency be measured solely on the basis of test scores? Foreseeing the limitation of teacher testing, several states further employ assessment instruments prior to granting certification (e.g., Georgia, Florida). Thus, two modes of measuring teacher competency exist: internal (i.e., the use of standardized tests) and/or external (i.e., the use of observational assessment). The measures can be either simplistic (e.g., Utah) or complex (e.g., Georgia).

The focus of this paper will deal with issues surrounding the validity of internal measures of teacher competency. Validation of setting standards will minimally be addressed. Both validation and the establishment of standards are individually determined by the user.

Validity of Internal Measurement

Validity in teacher competency testing is concerned with the determination of the abilities necessary for effective practice. Effective practice is defined as meeting the health, safety, and welfare of the public while practicing the profession of teaching. Three types of validity can be

discussed: content, criterion, and construct. Each are definable separately, while still maintaining a unique inter-relationship. Content validity deals with test item representation that provides for "a fair sample of the universe of situations (encountered by teachers)" (Cascio, 1982, p. 148). Criterion validity refer to either predictability of "future outcomes or descriptions of a (concurrent) status" (Cascio, 1982, p. 150). Construct validity provides a means for "some sort of theoretical framework (required) to organize and explain data and to provide direction for further investigation" (Cascio, 1982, p. 155).

Much attention has been focused on content validity, especially with increased use of the NTE. The NTE provides a measure of student academic achievement in conjunction with teacher preparation programs. The validity of the NTE is content derived. Content for both the NTE Core Battery (tests of communication skills, general knowledge, and professional knowledge) and the 27 Specialty Area tests have been studied and tested for validity. Expert authorities (e.g., college professors, practitioners) designed the test content based on college curriculums of teacher training programs. Studies support evidence that high correlations exist between the NTE tests and college programs, even though a variety of programs exist and professional entry skills vary. A revision of determining the NTE content is currently underway. Consultants will be used to identify various criteria. Items will be tested for agreement across college curriculums, practice, and public opinion. Results will establish preassessment before final developments occur. Because of the narrow use of the NTE, developers at the Education Testing Service (ETS) have established proper uses for the tests. An underlying principle assumes that test users (e.g., state agencies, local

school boards) will establish validation studies against specific uses of the tests, that uphold Title VI and Title VII and do not result in adverse impact of specific populations. NTE/ETS will recommend procedures for the validation process. In working with Georgia officials, ETS established the following method for validation: evaluation of grade level textbooks and curriculum guides established test objectives; job analysis pinpointed the essence and percentages of time factors to meet each objective; item by item assessment resulted in worth with regard to: the objective, content, accuracy, bias, clarity, readibility, language level, relevancy, and minimum competency; field testing was completed for item analysis with special emphasis placed in regard to group impact; and standards (i.e., cut-off scores) were established. Competency in Georgia used for certification is job related as applied to the public school curriculum. Competencies are not defined by means of an evaluation of college training programs. Rather, the exams developed test subject matter minimally needed for initial state certification.

Conversely, validation of NTE exams in New Mexico assess teacher training and entry competencies. Three phases were employed by the State Department of Education: 1) set up of data collection, 2) collection of data, and 3) analysis of the data to finalize. Content validity was met if: an item was found to be 90% appropriate to New Mexico college programs, at least 50% agreement existed between the item and teacher training curriculum; and the Index of Relative Emphasis (i.e., the degree of emphasis placed in curriculums) equalled 40. Standards were developed to correlate job relevance and an item analysis was tested for cultural sensitivity.

The last two types of validity found with teacher competency have been the focus of much criticism. Criterion validity, especially predictability of internal measures is more of an issue presently than concurrent concepts,

although both Texas and Arkansas require internal measures of concurrent competencies. Construct validity affects both content and criterion validity. Assumptions based on standards contend that tests found to be content valid produce effective practices. Additionally, readinesss (as determined by the standards) for entry into a practice is assumed to be related to the actual performance, as practiced.

Validation of internal measures encompasses: content, criterion, and construct validity. Each has a vital role in the development and establishment of teacher testing procedures. Further, each presents unique problems for educators, separately and combined.

Problematic Concerns of Internal Measurement

Many concerns exist with validity of internal measurements of teacher competency. To begin with, the term competency implies "...the ability to cope or deal with a certain class of problems that a teacher encounters on the job. A fully competent teacher is one who can cope successfully with any professional problem" (Coker and Coker, 1975, p. 7). By definition, competencies must be inclusive. Educators contend that competencies, skills, and/or a knowledge base for teaching is unobservable and incomplete, unclear, undefinable, and nonexistent (Christner and Others, 1979; Flippo & Foster, 1984; Hyman, 1984; Poham & Yallow, 1984). Current validity is derived from academia and therefore reflects cognitive abilities. The exclusion of clinical (i.e., affective aptitudes and application) sources is undeniably visible. Frontal teaching (i.e., measurable behaviors such as lecturing) comprise 85% of the teaching process leaving 15% unaccountable. Further, academic testing implies that there is only one correct solution to an

educational problem. Any teacher can easily refute this claim, for often in practice one encounters numerous solutions to a given problem (e.g., motivation of students). Thus, the "road to an empirically founded competency based test will be (excruciating and long)" (Lorentz, 1976, p. 29).

Predictive validity incurs conceptual and practical problems. Practitioners and professionals have unclear distinctions of what constitutes teacher successfulness. Predictability for success varies and is dependent upon test developers' views of what constitutes acceptable and unacceptable practices. Since test content is primarily obtained from state adopted texts, editors now impact the measures used for predictability.

Scores from internal measurements have not clearly distinguished the "functional from the nonfunctional individual" (Stedman, 1984, p. 3). Further data has not supported a relationship between "adult accomplishment and academic talent" (Stedman, 1984, p. 3). Academic achievement was further found to be unrelated to success in practice. Too, predictability implies evaluation-testing is not necessarily evaluative, and thus the accuracy of the measure is questionable. In addition, tests for certification do not focus on competencies necessary for success and thus are inaccurately predictive and labelled.

Construct validity is extremely crucial to the teaching profession. Can the interpretation of the standards assure the public of safe and successful teachers? Do specialty tests, based on domains, adequately measure competencies of teachers who have specialized in one aspect of a given domain (e.g, geometry to math)?

Scores should be cautiously interpreted. Standard setting has its greatest impact on minorities, particularly Black educators. Teacher testing in Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, and Mississippi resulted in decreased

teacher certification for Blacks. In Florida alone, the passing rate for Anglos varied from 80-90% as compared to Black percentages of 32-37. Similar results exist in California and Georgia: 67% Anglos to 26% Black; 87% Anglos to 34% Black, respectfully. On the surface, it appears that testing results in adverse impact. Yet, attempts in both North Carolina (1975) and South Carolina (1971) to prove adverse impact on the NTE were not substantiated. However, in a recent out of court decision, ETS has agreed to exam tests items for disparate impact. In essence, what has evolved with construct validity is a standard set high for public acceptance at the cost of the exclusion of minorities.

Because of education's uniqueness, problems exist with the interrelatedness of the three validity types. First, the "product" of education is difficult to define and measure. If the "product" of education is measured by academic outcomes, why then do academics comprise only 50% of the criteria for parental school selection? "Education," by nature, thus includes many nonmeasurable aspects. This, again, supports the mislabelling of teacher testing; many competencies of education cannot be measured, especially on basic knowledge tests. Second, use of a single criterion cannot adequately predict or imply that teachers possess complete competencies needed for successful practice. Yet, Arkansas legislation mandates the use of the state teacher competency exams (tests of basis knowledge) as the sole basis for certification. Third, mass education is legally grounded. Demand (students) must be met by supply (teachers). Can tests adequately be applied for emergency teaching certificates, when a shortage of supply exists? Fourth, with more mandated teacher testing, increased test dates will be required. In order to meet state deadlines and implementation, the NTE will have to be offered more frequently than the four times currently designated.

Arkansas recently increased the number of tests given because of the unexpected compliance with Act 76 requiring tests for recertifications. Furtner, New Mexico law allows only two Specialty Area Tests to be taken per year. Such a ruling greatly affects certification, especially since the tests are required for licensure. Fifth, nationwide testing will never result in uniformity or reciprocity of teaching certificates when validation and determination of standards vary and are dependent upon users. Tests of basic knowledge may be used differently from one state to another and likewise standard setting processes vary. A final concern of present teacher testing issues is related to student achievement. A highly believable and underlying assumption surrounding teaching testing is the correlation between higher teacher expectations and automatic increases in student achievement. Standardized tests used to measure student achievement were not designed to measure teacher effectiveness. Little evidence exists between acceptable measures of teacher test performance and increased student achievement.

Legal Considerations Impacting Internal Measures of the NTE

Legally, correct uses of the NTE have been regulated by the Fifth and Fourteenth Constitutional Amendments, Title VII, and EEOC regulations as well as guidelines documented in: The Standards for Educational and Psychological Tests, Uniform Guidelines on Employee Selection Procedures, and the Joint Technical Standards for Educational and Psychological Testing. Court cases involving the NTE, document misuses and uses of the tests: misuse of the exams "as the sole criterion for decisions, whether concerning certification, selection, admission, or program evaluation (Baker v. Columbus Municipal Separate School District, 1971; United States v. Nansemond County School Board, 1972; United States v. South Carolina, 1977); misusing NTE

tests, directly or indirectly, to determine the compensation, retention, termination, advancement, pay supplements, or change in provisional employment status of teachers once they are employed (United States v. Chesterfield County School district, 1971; Carroll v. Board of the Memphis City Schools, 1973); and using the NTE tests, whether for certification, selection, or admission without appropriate standard setting studies (Newman v. Crews, 1981; Guidelines for Using the NTE Tests, 1983, p. 10). Additionally, case law establishes procedure for test validation (Griggs v. Duke Power Co, 1971; Albermarle Paper Co. v. Moody, 1975; Washington v. Davis, 1976; Connecticut v. Teal, 1982).

Conclusion

The issue at hand is clearly not teacher competency but rather the issue of teacher testing. The current popularity of teacher teaching allows for content, criterion, and construct validity to be assessed, as pertaining to achievement levels on basic knowledge exams. Teacher competency is a complex issue that is inaccurately confused with or identified as measures derived from academic testing. The problems in addressing the validity of teacher competencies are located in the very definitions of validity provided earlier. Items used for measurement will never represent a fair and universal sample of skills encountered by teachers. Many skills found in effective teachers are not measurable. Thus, content validity has yet to be substantiated. Further, predictability and assessment of practitioners cannot be founded until teacher competency measures become content valid. Current data on the use of achievement tests for predictability or assessment of concurrent skills is not favorable. The interpretation of standards to explain or provide direction can never be achieved if the content to be measured is unclear. Can

recognition, or a lack of, a competency be obtained from a standard if "competencies" are undefinable and content found to be invalid? Surely educators, and noneducators alike, desire teachers who display more "competencies" than academic achievement. The public is gravely fooling itself by believing current methods of assessing teachers is a measurement of teacher competency.

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